

PRESS RELEASE

U.S. Army Soldier Pleads Guilty To Terrorism Charges For Attempting To Assist ISIS To Conduct Deadly Ambush On U.S. Troops

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of New York

U.S. Army Private First Class Cole Bridges Provided Tactical Guidance in Attempt to Help ISIS Attack and Murder U.S. Service Members in the Middle East

Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced today that COLE BRIDGES, a/k/a "Cole Gonzales," pled guilty to attempting to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization and attempting to murder U.S. military service members based on BRIDGES's efforts to assist the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham ("ISIS") to attack and kill U.S. soldiers in the Middle East. BRIDGES pled guilty today before U.S. District Judge Lewis J. Liman.

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said: "As he admitted in court today, Cole Bridges attempted to orchestrate a murderous ambush on his fellow soldiers in service of ISIS and its violent ideology. Bridges's traitorous conduct was a betrayal of his comrades and his country. Thanks to the incredible work of the

prosecutors of this Office and our partners at the FBI and the U.S. Army, Bridges's malign intent was revealed, and he now awaits sentencing for his crimes.”

According to the Complaint, the Indictment to which BRIDGES pled guilty, and other documents in the public record, as well as statements made in public court proceedings:

BRIDGES joined the U.S. Army in approximately September 2019 and was assigned as a cavalry scout in the Third Infantry Division based in Fort Stewart, Georgia. Beginning in at least 2019, BRIDGES began researching and consuming online propaganda promoting jihadists and their violent ideology. BRIDGES also expressed his support for ISIS and jihad on social media. In or about October 2020, BRIDGES began communicating with a Federal Bureau of Investigation (“FBI”) online covert employee (the “OCE”), who was posing as an ISIS supporter in contact with ISIS fighters in the Middle East. During these communications, BRIDGES expressed his frustration with the U.S. military and his desire to aid ISIS. BRIDGES then provided training and guidance to purported ISIS fighters who were planning attacks, including advice about potential targets in New York City. BRIDGES also provided the OCE with portions of a U.S. Army training manual and guidance about military combat tactics, for use by ISIS.

In or about December 2020, BRIDGES began to supply the OCE with instructions for the purported ISIS fighters on how to attack U.S. forces in the Middle East. Among other things, BRIDGES diagrammed specific military maneuvers intended to help ISIS fighters maximize the lethality of attacks on U.S. troops. BRIDGES further provided advice about the best way to fortify an ISIS encampment to repel an attack by U.S. Special Forces, including by wiring certain buildings with explosives to kill the U.S. troops. Then, in January 2021, BRIDGES provided the OCE with a video of himself in his U.S. Army body armor standing in front of a flag often used by ISIS fighters and making a gesture symbolic of support for ISIS. Approximately a week later, BRIDGES sent a second video in which BRIDGES, using a voice manipulator, narrated a propaganda speech in support of the anticipated ambush by ISIS on U.S. troops.

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BRIDGES, 22, of Stow, Ohio, pled guilty to attempting to provide material support to ISIS, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison, and attempting to murder U.S. military service members, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison. BRIDGES is scheduled to be sentenced by Judge Liman on November 2, 2023, at 2:00 p.m.

The statutory maximum penalties are prescribed by Congress and are provided here for informational purposes only, as any sentencing of the defendant will be determined by the judge.

Mr. Williams praised the outstanding efforts of the FBI's New York Joint Terrorism Task Force, which primarily consists of investigators and analysts from the FBI, the New York City Police Department, and over 50 other federal, state, and local agencies. Mr. Williams also thanked U.S. Army Counterintelligence, the FBI Washington Field Office, the FBI Atlanta Field Office and its Savannah Resident Agency, the FBI Cleveland Field Office, the FBI's Counterterrorism Division, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Georgia, the Air Force Office of Special Investigations, U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command, the U.S. Army Third Infantry Division, and the Counterterrorism Section of the Department of Justice's National Security Division for their assistance.

This prosecution is being handled by the Office's National Security and International Narcotics Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Sam Adelsberg and Matthew Hellman are in charge of the prosecution, with assistance from Trial Attorney Michael Dittoe of the Counterterrorism Section.

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